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ABSTRACT

Despite the importance of community college administrative positions and the recognition of their stressful nature, they have traditionally received little scholarly or professional attention. Recently, however, professional associations have been developed solely for the purpose of providing professional development opportunities to college administrators. The literature that does exist suggests that administrators have traditionally come from faculty ranks, and that since 1970, fewer administrators have come from outside the community colleges. Personal characteristics of effective administrators include responsibility, integrity, and intellectual efficiency, while professional skills are related to planning, organization, and office management. The most important ability appears to be having strong interpersonal skills. It has been suggested that college administrators must move toward more open and less inhibiting methods of reaching decisions in order to provide opportunities for faculty and others to become involved in leadership. While the literature on community college administrators contains few empirical studies addressing needs, skills, challenges, and roles, it is fairly clear that as the demographic composition of the United States changes, so too will the leadership of community colleges. Finally, there is a tremendous need to develop administrative research directly applicable to performance and to develop meaningful dialogue throughout higher education about roles and functions of different educational bodies. (Contains 17 references.) (HAA)

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Administrative Perspectives on Community College Leadership

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Academic administration has been described as one of the most stressful occupations in the United States (Cloud, 1992). Despite the prima facia importance of the positions and the identified level of distress, little scholarly or professional work has been done to clarify and improve practice in the administration of community colleges (Twombly & Moore, 1987).

The deficiency of literature on community college administration has a largely undefined base, and only efforts within the past decade have demonstrated the feasibility and necessity of this population. So compelling is the need to examine and devote resources toward community college administration, that professional associations have been developed with the primary purpose of providing professional development opportunities to different administrators, such as department chairs (Seagren & Miller, 1993). Much of the base for the creation of these association and activities is the contention that leadership is vital to the health and success of a community college, and the middle- and upper-level administrator is best suited to display this leadership (Chieffo, 1992). By accepting this contention that administrators are more likely to undertake leadership roles in the colleges as compared to faculty, the current discussion was intended to review and discuss the critical literature related to community college administration.

Leaders in the College

Administrators have traditionally come from faculty ranks, although considerations for the stress of the administrative post have deterred some faculty from pursuing administrative positions (Cloud, 1992). Administrators also traditionally came from external labor markets, such as secondary schools, colleges and universities, and business and industry (Twombly, 1988A; Miller & Seagren, 1995). This trend has changed somewhat in recent years as authority lines have become more structured, and career progression within the college is a greater possibility.

The general concept of academic leadership has received a good deal of attention in both the scholarly and practitioner literature. Few efforts have been exclusively devoted, however, to the community college. Twombly (1988A; 1988B) noted that fewer administrators since 1970 have come from outside of the community college system, and that those who do move in to the administrative ranks of two-year colleges are mostly reliant on personal "contacts" to obtain their position (Twombly & Moore, 1987). These trends suggest that the current community college has a rather internal or self-serving attitude toward hiring. As community colleges face a variety of challenges, ranging from serving business and industry training needs and a changing student body, the need to incorporate external leaders may have never been greater.

Leadership in higher education has often been identified through a variety of characteristics, but fewer efforts have

actually postulated desired characteristics for two-year colleges. Hammons and Guillory (1991) conceded that there a number of grocery lists of leadership skills, but proposed two distinct listings of personal and professional skills needed by those leading community colleges. Personal characteristics of the effective administrator included responsibility, integrity, creativity, self-control, intellectual efficiency, personal relations, leadership, and a motivation to achieve. Professional skills needed were planning skills, knowledge about the position, organizational skills, office management skills, sound judgement, human relations skills, and an ability to recognize quality performance. Chieffo (1992) particularly added vision to the successful administrators repertoire of skills, and Miller (1995) added financial management skills.

Seagren, et al, (1994) also conceded the variety of expectations of the community college administrator, and proposed a four-dimensional model for effective administration, particularly at the departmental or academic unit level. The model which held personal and professional interests as competing ends of a spectrum, contended that challenges and coping strategies conversely pressure the administrator.

Cloud (1992) specifically recognized the need for administrators to respond in a timely way to the social, economic, political, and legal issues which confront their local communities. He went as far as to identify that approximately 75% of the stress in the administrator's life is attributable to

the administrative position. The close proximity of local governing boards may also add to the pressure of the administrator, as trustees attempt to convey personal agendas, micro-manage the college, and "interfere" with the operations of the college.

The results of existing research and study tend to portray a vastly confused and perhaps overly segmented approach to the attributes of "leadership" and "management." The skill which has appeared to transcend practitioner and research reports is the that of strong interpersonal skills. Chieffo (1992) noted that a "people" orientation to an administrative post has the highest correlation to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Johns and Taylor (1987) supported this contention by claiming that those who work in fund raising and contract and grant management are strongly motivated by a desire to affiliate with others in their office setting and those connected with the institution. The same conclusion was reached by Reyes and Twombly (1987) in their discussion of decision making and governance in the community college. Their contention held that although bureaucratic lines of authority are typically well defined, a "political bureaucracy" seemed the appropriate classification for effective governance, as consensus building and faculty and administrator loyalties were paramount to decision implementation.

Alternatively, Harris (1996) described empowerment as the key to developing, cultivating, and building leadership in the

community college. She wrote that leaders exist throughout the college, and that the difficulty in fostering this leadership potential is the provision of opportunities for faculty and others to become involved in leadership opportunities. To better accomplish this, she contended, community college administrators must move from lockstep management strategies to more open and less inhibiting methods of reaching decisions. Marsick and Watkins (1992) similarly advocated this practice, particularly in relation to providing professional continuing education opportunities for employees to participate in reflective practice. This concept supports employees accomplishing tasks related to their jobs, reflecting on their actions and the methods utilized in these actions, and then granting the employees opportunities to modify their actions and methods to reach more effective and efficient processes and outcomes.

Similarly, Cross (1993) noted that the recent conceptualization of quality management in higher education is predicated on the assumption that individuals "manage themselves to assume individual responsibility toward common ends" (p. 16). To this end, allusions are made to involving community college faculty in the governance process, a process which requires a different set of skills than those in private sector management. Boggs (1994) furthered this notion, contending that leadership in community colleges can arise from anywhere in the institution, and to develop this leadership potential there must be a

clarification of the expectations of faculty early in the decision-making process.

Discussion

The purpose for conducting the current literature review was to identify some of the critical findings and contemporary thoughts regarding the administration of community colleges. Despite numerous citations available on the subject, few empirical studies specifically addressed the needs, skills, challenges, and roles of community college administrators. Although studies such as Twombly's prove valuable to understanding labor markets, there seems to be a lack of direct research into the these important positions.

As the demographic composition of the nation and individual communities change, so too will the leadership and focus of community colleges in order to fulfill local needs. Undergraduate enrollments suggest that the community college is fast becoming the education of choice. Kent (1996) noted that nearly one-half of all first-year students enroll in community colleges. As any institution experiences continual and rapid growth exhibited through growing enrollments and expectations, growth pains will accompany, requiring specific adjustments in attitudes, behaviors, and administrative structures. Roueche (1996) emphasized the need for trustees, administrators, and faculty to recognize and understand that colleges will never again be like they were in the 1960's, 70's, and 80's. Societal

and economic changes that are affecting the world are also affecting higher education's direction. Future leadership will need to be visionary and adaptive to change. In essence, gone are the days of the small make-shift administration, patch-worked with faculty part-time managing small enrollments, budgets, and facilities in a loosely structured academic environment.

Acknowledging the community college's expansive efforts, leadership will need to be more exact and skilled in areas of administration and management, resulting in what has been described as a 'collegial profession,' and not simply an add-on to faculty duties. The results of the dearth of literature is a need to develop administrative research which is directly applicable to performance. Research and literature in community college administration identified here appeared to be a dynamic body of work reliant on the collaboration of both scholars and practitioners. Subsequently, scholars must not scorn this literature, but rather, embrace it as an opportunity to further understand the philosophy of higher education.

As both academic and applied understanding of administrative positions and behaviors evolves, so must community college leadership. Various research methodologies and dissemination activities must be employed in the future to fully develop the administrative potential of administrators and leaders alike. This research may take the form of "best-practice" of administrators, and then utilize this expertise to train mid-level managers, such as department chairs who will become future

senior leaders in the college. And as administrators and leadership issues are addressed, possibilities for leadership development may be through faculty senates/councils or other joint decision-making bodies.

There is a strong need to begin concerted efforts to develop administration from within the system instead of relying on it to evolve or eventually 'float to the top.' Also, traditional practices have shown administrative positions being filled from outside of the college system, often inviting personnel in from the local community, or filling positions from university-level personnel administrative ranks. Perhaps there are means for community colleges to begin and sustain the production of their own leadership.

Finally, there is a tremendous need for meaningful dialogue throughout higher education about roles and functions of different educational bodies. Professional associations such as the Council on Universities and Colleges which combine practitioners and scholars may prove to be one of the most effective means to enhancing this dialogue. Also, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has shown efforts to create a community college research agenda to provide better reflective information defining purpose, self, and structure (Boggs, 1994).

Community colleges as a whole, and specifically administrative and faculty groups, must begin to take the initiative for developing their own talents, skills, and future

leadership. For too long, community colleges have relied on others to conduct research about their nature, purpose, and direction. Additionally, other sources have served as personnel hiring banks. If community college administration and institutions are going to develop and mature, perhaps the following should be considered:

1. Bring the level of the community college and leadership up to a nationally recognized respectable level. Two-year colleges have often had to deal with political appointments rather than focusing on quality administrative leadership. Additionally, Kent (1996) noted that "community colleges are not so much unsung as unknown as a national institution" (p. 32).

2. Professionals within the community college confines should conduct their own self-reporting leadership research from their empirical environment and situational circumstances. Research not directed from an outside agenda will prove beneficial to the entire system in the long-run.

3. There should be a concerted effort to identify, target, and recruit promising junior faculty and mid-level administrators, with intentions of tracking them into future leadership roles. Community college leadership development will excel as intentions are purposefully sought, embraced, nurtured to maturation, and actions become habit instead of after-thought.

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